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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 COLOMBO 000685

SIPDIS

DEPARTMENT FOR SA, SA/INS, INR/NESA

NSC FOR E. MILLARD

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [CE](#)

SUBJECT: Sri Lanka: New foreign secretary named;
More changes in MFA expected as new FM assumes reins

Refs: (A) Colombo 669

- (B) USDAO Colombo Ce IIR 6 816 0066 04

(U) Classified by James F. Entwistle, Deputy Chief of Mission. Reasons 1.5 (b,d).

1. (C) SUMMARY: Sri Lanka has a new foreign secretary. H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, a career foreign service officer, was named to the position on April 20. Former Fonsec Goonetilleke is slated to fill in as acting UN Permrep in New York and then go to Ottawa to be high commissioner. While other personnel changes are said to be in the works at the MFA in the aftermath of the recent parliamentary election and change in government, they are not expected to be large-scale. That said, new FM Kadirgamar, who was also FM from 1994-2001, is said to be intent on removing those in key MFA slots whom he considers to have been close to the former UNP government. END SUMMARY.

2. (SBU) NEW FOREIGN SECRETARY: On April 20, President Kumaratunga appointed H.M.G.S. Palihakkara to the post of foreign secretary, the highest career rank in Sri Lanka's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and second-in-charge of the ministry after Foreign Minister Kadirgamar. Before his new posting, Palihakkara had been deputy chief of the GSL's Peace Secretariat and also Ambassador to Thailand. Bio-data on Palihakkara is provided in Para 7.

3. (C) FORMER FONSEC TO OTTAWA: Palihakkara's predecessor as foreign secretary, Ambassador Bernard Goonetilleke, is slated to become the next High Commissioner to Canada. In an April 20 conversation, he told Ambassador Lunstead that, before assuming duties in Ottawa, he may also serve temporarily as Sri Lanka's UN Permrep in New York. (Charles Mahendran, the former UN Permrep, is being forced out due to his close links with the former United National Party, "UNP," government.) Goonetilleke, who had only been foreign secretary since September 2003, stated that the foreign secretarial changeover from him to Palihakkara had been worked out long ago. Goonetilleke told the Ambassador, however, that he had been set to continue on as Peace Secretariat chief after the foreign secretary changeover. With the change in government, however, those plans had changed. (Goonetilleke was known to be quite close to the previous UNP government.) Goonetilleke said he looked forward to Ottawa and noted that he had a son living in Canada.

4. (C) MORE CHANGES IN MFA EXPECTED: Other changes in key MFA positions are also expected, including the following:

-- Rosy Senanayake, High Commissioner to Malaysia, is expected to be recalled. A former beauty queen, she is a political appointee with strong ties to the former UNP government. President Kumaratunga is known to dislike her.

-- V.K. Walsan, Ambassador to Sweden, is another UNP political appointee who is likely to be recalled.

-- U.B. Wijekoon, Ambassador to Russia, is a political appointee from the previous government. Mission has heard that he, too, will be recalled.

-- Maj. Gen. Janaka Perera (ret'd), High Commissioner to Australia, is a UNP political appointee and we have heard that he may be recalled.

-- Gen. Rohan de S. Daluwatte, Ambassador to Brazil, is also scheduled to return to Sri Lanka. Mission had heard that Daluwatte could potentially become the next Defense Secretary, but Cyril Herath will continue to hold this position. It is possible that Daluwatte could assume a different portfolio within the MOD (see Ref B).

-- Dr. Piyasiri Wijesekera, Ambassador to Cuba, may be recalled. Wijesekera is the brother of Mahinda

Wijesekera, a former UNP minister and a fierce critic of President Kumaratunga's, and may suffer from that association.

-- Faiz Mustapha, High Commissioner to the UK and a close associate of Sri Lanka Muslim Congress leader Rauf Hakeem, may also be recalled. Although Mustapha is widely respected, he may be replaced given the fact that the UK slot is a prestigious one and the new government may want to dole it out to a supporter.

15. (C) Amid all of these possible changes at the MFA, Mission has heard of possible continuity at two major posts. Devinda Subasinghe, Ambassador to the U.S., may be staying on in that position. While a political appointee of the previous government's, Subasinghe has also maintained contacts with the President and her party. Another current Sri Lankan envoy, Mangala Moonesinghe, High Commissioner to India, appears likely to stay in his position. He is a former MP for the President's Sri Lanka Freedom Party and is said to have maintained close links with Kumaratunga.

16. (C) COMMENT: New Foreign Minister Lakshman Kadirgamar is said to be intent on removing those in key MFA slots whom he considers to have been close to the former UNP government. Kadirgamar, who served previously as FM from 1994-2001, knows every nook and cranny of the MFA and will move quickly to take charge. Although Palihakkara has a good reputation, it is a shame that Goonetilleke is leaving as foreign secretary and as chief of the Peace Secretariat. Mission found him easy to work with, candid, and quite efficient. END COMMENT.

17. (SBU) BIO-DATA ON PALIHAKKARA: H.M.G.S. Palihakkara, Sri Lanka's new Foreign Secretary, is 57. ("Hewa Matara Gamage Siripala" Palihakkara goes by "Siri" for short.) In addition to his MFA duties, Palihakkara may also become the next Director General of the GSL's Peace Secretariat -- the dual role that his predecessor, Bernard Goonetilleke, had. Immediately prior to his appointment as foreign secretary, Palihakkara, a career officer, had served as deputy chief at the Peace Secretariat and as Ambassador to Thailand from 2001 to 2004. In Bangkok, he was also accredited to Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia. He has also served as Permrep at Sri Lanka's UN Mission in Geneva and as an officer at Sri Lanka's UN Mission in New York. Educated at the University of Ceylon in Peradeniya, Palihakkara also participated in a diplomatic training course in Australia and completed a UN Fellowship on Security and Disarmament. A Sinhalese Buddhist from the southern town of Matara, he is married with one son. In our dealings with him, we have found Palihakkara affable and articulate. END BIO-DATA.

18. (U) Minimize considered.

LUNSTEAD